



ISJS NEWSLETTER

Vol#08 | Issue#07 | No.02 | July 2025

Speak Up

BRIDGING EAST AND WEST: THE COSMIC DANCE

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Brian Greene describes the universe as a grand dance in his famous book *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory*. He refers to the universe as having every step choreographed by nature, time, effort, and external factors, and by doing so, he echoes the five *samavāyas* (essential conditions) of Jainism. Both philosophies, in their own ways, seek to understand the rhythm behind this cosmic dance.

One may wonder whether some coincidences or parallels can be drawn between Jainism's five *samavāyas* and Western philosophies. The answer lies in exploring the profound depths of philosophical traditions, both in the East and the West. Jainism's five *samavāyas*—*svabhāva* (intrinsic nature), *niyati* (destiny), *kāla labdhi* (time appropriateness), *puruṣārtha* (human effort), and *nimitta* (external cause)—offer a holistic view of causation, balancing intrinsic and extrinsic factors in shaping reality. These are found in early texts like the *Kārtikeyānuprekṣā*, *Sanmati Tarka Prakaraṇa*, *Śāstravārtāsamuccaya*, *Padma Purāṇa*, etc, and also discussed in later literature, including the *Mokṣamārga Prakāśaka*. Interestingly, many Western philosophies echo similar concepts, albeit through different cultural and intellectual lenses. Let us look at them one by one:

1. **Svabhāva (intrinsic nature):** The soul's capacity for knowledge and perception is part of its intrinsic nature. Different Western philosophers have presented different ideas about this:
 - a. **Aristotle's Essentialism:** Aristotle argued that every entity has an intrinsic essence or "substantial form" that defines its nature and purpose (*telos*). This is akin to *svabhāva* in Jainism, where substances act according to their inherent properties.



- b. **Spinoza's Substance Monism:** Spinoza described everything as part of a single substance (God or Nature), where each part possesses its intrinsic qualities.

We can see that both Jainism and Western philosophies emphasize that the intrinsic nature governs behavior and characteristics, underscoring an essentialist worldview.

2. **Niyati (Destiny or Determinism):** It reflects the inevitability of certain outcomes based on karmic structure and cosmic rhythm.
 - a. **Stoicism:** Stoic philosophy embraces determinism through the concept of logos, the universal rational order. Events are predetermined by natural laws, which must be accepted with equanimity.
 - b. **Leibniz's Pre-established Harmony:** Leibniz proposed that everything in the universe operates in perfect pre-established harmony, determined by God.
 - c. **Calvinism (Theological Determinism):** Calvinist thought asserts that divine predestination determines human fate.

Jainism's concept of Niyati aligns with Western determinism, yet the Jain philosophy allows for self-effort, providing a balance that many Western deterministic models lack.

3. **Kāla Labdhi (Time Appropriateness):** It emphasizes the right moment when karmic fruition becomes possible. In spiritual contexts, *kāla labdhi* is often cited when a soul attains rare opportunities—like meeting a true guru, receiving scriptural insight, or experiencing a breakthrough in meditation—precisely when conditions are ripe.
 - a. **Heidegger's Temporality:** Heidegger explored the concept of time as central to human existence. Events and experiences unfold in specific temporal contexts, much like Jainism's emphasis on time as a factor enabling action.
 - b. **Heraclitus' Flux and Time:** Heraclitus viewed time as an ever-changing flow where events are shaped by their temporal context.
 - c. **Einstein's Theory of Relativity:** Though scientific, Einstein's concept of time being relative to the observer complements Jainism's view of time as a medium for change and events.



Both traditions view time as a crucial enabler, though Jainism emphasizes its metaphysical role, while Western thought explores its existential and physical aspects.

4. **Puruṣārtha (Human Effort):** It's the driver of spiritual progress, allowing the soul to overcome karmic inertia.
 - a. **Sartre's Existentialism:** Sartre's philosophy emphasizes individual freedom and responsibility. Like Jainism, existentialism holds that humans shape their destiny through conscious effort. He states: "Man is condemned to be free."
 - b. **William James's Pragmatism:** Pragmatism values action and effort in determining truth and achieving goals, resonating with Jainism's emphasis on *puruṣārtha*.
 - c. **Kant's Moral Philosophy:** Kant stressed the importance of human autonomy and rational will in achieving moral progress, akin to Jainism's focus on self-effort.

Both Jainism and Western thought underscore the primacy of individual effort in overcoming limitations and achieving higher goals.

5. **Nimitta (External Cause):** It's the catalyst, not the creator. *Nimitta* sets the stage for karma to bear fruit, but the real cause lies within the soul's own karmic store. *Nimitta* can be a person, object, situation, or even a scripture—anything that activates latent karma.
 - a. **Aristotle's Four Causes:** Aristotle's concept of the efficient cause (external agent or condition enabling change) mirrors Jainism's *nimitta*. For example, a sculptor is the efficient cause of a statue.
 - b. **David Hume's Theory of Causation:** Hume explored how external factors influence events through causation, questioning the dependency between cause and effect.
 - c. **Relational Ontology (Whitehead):** Whitehead's process philosophy views entities as interconnected, where external relations influence the emergence of events.

The idea of *nimitta* in Jainism aligns with Western thought on causation, highlighting the role of external conditions while maintaining the importance of intrinsic properties.

Synthesis: A Confluence of Perspectives

Both Jainism and Western philosophies grapple with causality, responsibility, and the nature of existence. While Jainism achieves a delicate balance between determinism (*niyati*, *svabhāva*)

and free will (*puruṣārtha*), Western philosophies often oscillate between extremes. Time (*kāla labdhi*) plays a pivotal role in both traditions, albeit with differing emphases—metaphysical in Jainism and existential in the West. This comparative lens not only bridges these two intellectual traditions but also opens avenues for deeper philosophical dialogue, proving that ancient wisdom and modern thought are far more intertwined than they seem.

Conclusion: Let's not dance on our own beats but converge with the cosmic dance that stretches to the limits and limitlessness of the world.

